

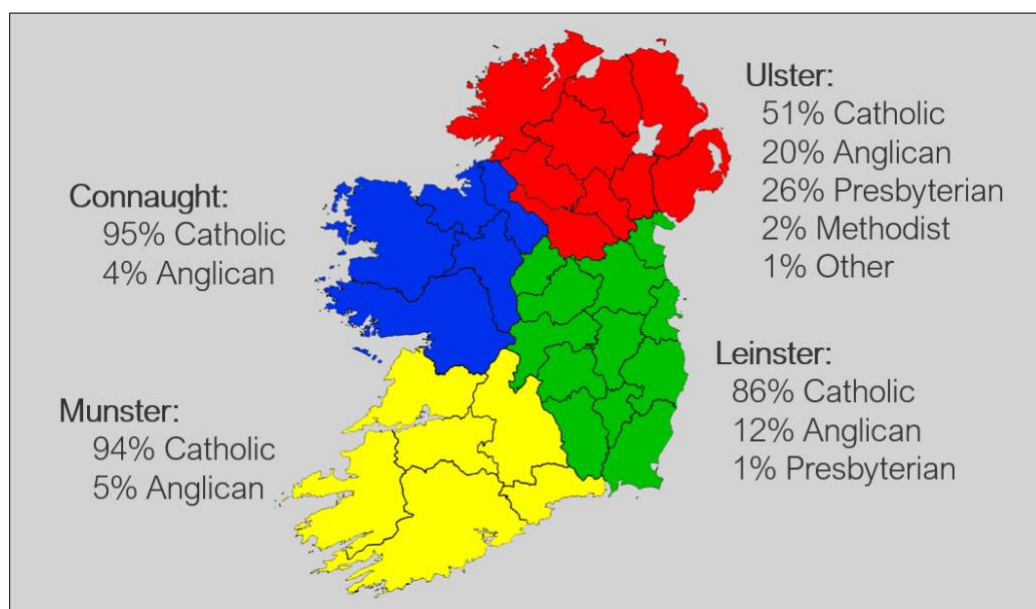
Irish Roman Catholic Records

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Historical and Modern Church Membership in Ireland

The Roman Catholic Church is the predominant church in Ireland and has been since the days of Saint Patrick. The 1861 census of Ireland documented religious affiliation across all of Ireland:



Per the 2011 census of Ireland, over 84% of the people identify themselves as Roman Catholic.

The Practice of Maintaining Irish Catholic Parish Registers

The Synod of Drogheda in 1614 instructed priests to maintain baptismal and matrimonial registers, but the earliest surviving parish registers date from 1671 (in Wexford). 141 Catholic parishes kept registers beginning in 1700s that still survive, but the majority of extant Catholic parish registers began in the 1820s or later.

Catholic priests recorded baptisms and marriages but only rarely kept burial registers. Catholic parish records help trace ancestors in the decades prior to 1864, when civil registration began. In the early years of civil registration, some births and marriages went unregistered, thus elevating the value of Catholic parish registers even in the 1860s and 1870s for family history research.

Availability of Irish Catholic Parish Registers

Many organizations now provide some degree of access to Irish Catholic parish registers:

- **The local parish** holds the original parish registers and may offer access by appointment
- **The National Library of Ireland (NLI)** in Dublin has digitized microfilm copies of Catholic parish registers through 1880 or 1900 for 96% of the parishes (www.nli.ie/en/parish-register.aspx)
- **Ancestry** has indexed the NLI collection of Roman Catholic registers (www.ancestry.com)
- **FamilySearch** is indexing the NLI collection for free access (www.familysearch.org)
- **Findmypast** has indexed the NLI collection of Roman Catholic registers (www.findmypast.com)
- **The Departments of Arts, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht** offers free online indexes and some digital images of many Catholic parish registers for County Kerry, County Cork, Dublin City, and County Carlow, with planned additions for County Monaghan (www.irishgenealogy.ie)
- **The Irish Family History Foundation** offers fee-based access to historical records, including most Catholic parish registers (www.rootsireland.ie)
- **The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)** in Belfast holds microfilms of parish registers and has two online guides for church records in the province of Ulster:
 - www.proni.gov.uk/guide_to_church_records.pdf
 - www.proni.gov.uk/index_to_roman_catholic_records-6.pdf

Irish Catholic Baptismal Records

Catholic parents generally had their children baptized very soon after birth, so the baptism date is a good approximation of the birth date. A typical entry in a Catholic baptismal register contains at least this information: child's full name, date of the baptism, father's full name, mother's full maiden name, and godparents' (sponsors) names. Occasionally, the priest also recorded the place of residence (townland or street name) and the father's occupation. The mother's maiden name is written in Catholic baptismal entries, an important detail omitted in Church of Ireland baptismal entries. The mother's maiden name is key to properly identifying family groups and tracing maternal lineages. Also worth noting are the names of godparents, as they may have been family members.

Some priests kept parish registers in English, especially in more urban, English-speaking areas. Others wrote in Latin, particularly in rural, Gaelic-speaking regions. When the priest kept Latin records, he usually translated the first names into Latin. Priests also tended to abbreviate a number of first names and frequently repeated words.

Irish Catholic Marriage Records

A typical entry in a Catholic marriage register contains this information: full name of the groom, full maiden name of the bride, date of the marriage, and the names of the witnesses. Occasionally, the priest also recorded the place of residence, the names of the fathers of the bride and groom, and (recently) the maiden names of the mothers of the bride and groom.

Although civil registration of non-Catholic marriages began across Ireland in 1845, the registration of Catholic marriages did not begin until 1864 due to opposition from the Catholic Church. Therefore, family historians must consult parish registers for Catholic marriages before 1864 and would do well to examine church and civil registers for Catholic marriages thereafter.

Irish Catholic Death or Burial Records

Few Catholic parishes kept burial records until well into the twentieth century. Genealogical information is typically sparse, often limited to the full name of the deceased and the date of death or burial. Many Catholics (and Non-Conformists) were buried in Church of Ireland cemeteries, as the Church of Ireland was the state church. Family historians should check the burial register of the corresponding Church of Ireland parish when tracing Catholic ancestors.

Irish Catholic Confirmation Records

Some parishes maintain confirmation records, particularly in more recent years. These records are generally only available at the parish. A typical entry contains the child's name (occasionally both the use name and a confirmation name), father's full name, mother's name (possibly her maiden surname), the year or date of confirmation, the age in years and possibly months, and the townland of residence. Most of the confirmed were children, sometimes with siblings confirmed on the same day. Occasionally adults were confirmed, perhaps in anticipation of marriage and occasionally even later in life. Sometimes all the girls in a parish are confirmed as Mary or Bridget and the boys as Joseph or Patrick.

Identifying Your Ancestor's Irish Catholic Parish

Catholic parishes may have the same names as associated civil parishes, but they are generally larger and of earlier origin. A Catholic parish might have been created from an older, neighboring parish with registers that cover the ancestral population within the boundaries of both parishes. Also, any Catholic parish may have more than one name. For details, see the interactive map at www.registers.nli.ie.

If you know the townland or civil parish where your ancestor lived, there are a number of excellent sources to help you identify the Catholic parish of your ancestor, including:

- *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland* (by Brian Mitchell)
 - Catholic parish maps for each county
 - Civil parish maps for each county
- *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors* (by John Grenham)
 - Catholic parish maps for each county
 - Detailed tables of all Catholic parishes in each county
 - Dates of surviving baptism, marriage, and burial registers
 - Online: www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/counties/rcmaps

Principles and Practices for Tracing Irish Catholic Ancestors

The following principles and practices have helped many family historians successfully break through brick walls and discover their Irish Catholic heritage:

- **Records:** conduct “reasonably exhaustive research” in all available records
- **Families:** reconstitute entire families rather than focusing on individuals in isolation
- **Names:** become familiar with local name equivalents and Latin forms of names:
 - Abigail = Gobinet
 - Thadeus = Timothy
 - William = Gulielmus
 - Duvane = Kidney
 - Bogue = Boohig = Sullivan
- **Ages:** anticipate large errors in reported ages in census, marriage, and death records
- **Religion:** check Anglican parish registers for Catholic ancestors

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